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In between the Arts: Peter Greenaway and Sergei Eisenstein

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Abstract

Eisenstein in Guanajuato by Peter Greenaway was released in 2015. The film is about the period that the Russian director - Sergei Eisenstein - spent in Mexico, and how these days changed Eisenstein's life, in Greenaway's vision. But most importantly, the film is a powerful, visual reinterpretation of the key concept developed by Eisenstein throughout his life: The Montage.

Peter Greenaway is a talented British director, who also created paintings and several art installations, beside films. He declared more than once his admiration for Sergei Eisenstein, and with this film - the first of an entire trilogy about Eisenstein – he finally visually stated his reference to him.

But how much, and in which ways has Eisenstein influenced Greenaway's works? Is there a relation between Eisenstein's theories and ideas and Greenaway's cinematographic vision? This paper will try to answer these questions; it aims to understand and clarify the relationship between the two directors, defining the similar, peculiar aspects of their poetics and finally, focuses on the potentialities of Cinema as a total art, within and beyond Cinema itself.

Keywords

Peter Greenaway; Sergei Eisenstein; *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*; Montage; Cinema; Moving Images Studies

1. Introduction

Peter Greenaway is one of the most controversial and widely debatable directors of our time. Born in 1942 in Newport and now settled in Amsterdam, he realised several films, video art installations and paintings. He started his career as an artist, and then worked for 15 years in the Central Office of Information (COI) in London as a film editor, beginning in the same years to direct his own short films. He found in cinema a “total art” (Willoquet-Maricondi, 2001: 18-19), a medium composed by multiple communicative aspects.

The line connecting Peter Greenaway to Sergei Eisenstein is unclear and undefined so far, but appears full of potential and stimulating connections (Woods 1996; Hoyle 2016)¹. Several times the British director stated his admiration - even veneration - of Eisenstein, one of the recognised masters of cinema. If “Cinema is now dead” in Greenaway’s vision (Willoquet-Maricondi, 2001: 30), it was totally alive during the Twenties and Thirties when the Russian director of the *Battleship Potemkin* was experimenting with all the avant-garde potentialities of Montage. Peter Greenaway previously referred directly to Eisenstein several times. At the beginning of his career, for instance, he named an exhibition of art works - his first painting exhibition in 1964 - *Eisenstein in the Winter Palace*. Often, he restricted himself to quote the great director “silently” in his films or art works, and only spoke about him and his greatness in

¹ The first critical comparison between Peter Greenaway and Sergei Eisenstein is found in a few scattered points in the book by Alan Woods, *Being Naked-Paying Dead: The Art of Peter Greenaway* (1996). Furthermore, another fundamental precedent for this paper is the recent article by Brian Hoyle, “When Peter met Sergei: Art Cinema Past, Present and Future in *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*” (2016) which investigates the film *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* and its relevance in relation to Greenaway’s career.

interviews. It may be because Greenaway stated that it would be foolish to create a film about film, in the history only very few of these attempts were as successful for him as *8 1/2* by Federico Fellini (Greenaway, 2016). But despite those premises, Greenaway recently decided to direct an entire trilogy about Eisenstein, and in 2015, the first film *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* was presented at the 66th Berlin International Film Festival. Peter Greenaway's vast interest in Sergei Eisenstein is indeed evident. But how much, and in which ways has Eisenstein influenced Greenaway's works? Is there a relation between Eisenstein's theories and ideas and Greenaway's cinematographic vision? And if yes, which kind?

This paper will try to answer these questions, defining new connections in between the directors and attempting to identify some similarities in their poetics and expressive manners. The main goal is to interpret under new lights both directors, finally proposing the statement of a shared valuation of cinema as total art, as interdisciplinary media with huge and unique visual and communicative potentialities. In this sense, the paper will attempt to highlight some theories and practical approaches - that both the directors have in common - related to a consideration of Montage first of all as a method of thinking and composition, beyond the specific and restricted use of the cinematographic tool.

2. Eisenstein in Guanajuato

In May 1930, Sergei Eisenstein arrived in Hollywood where he spent several months trying to propose a project for a film with Paramount Pictures. At the beginning, the company was really interested in Eisenstein's work, but sooner it was clear that the vision of the Russian director was too far away from the more commercial American "movies" system. Furthermore, the political context was quickly changing in the USA in these years, as Americans began to see Communism - and all its associates - as dangerous.

Beyond all, Eisenstein found in the writer Upton Sinclair, the chance to finally realise a film outside Russia. The young American, with socialist interests, financed the project to make a film about Mexico. For this reason, and armed with this new fascinating task, Eisenstein spent almost two years in Mexico traveling around the country. Despite the frustration felt due to the endless work it took to achieve the film *¡Que viva Mexico!*², the period that Eisenstein spent in Mexico was indeed extremely fundamental to him (Seton, 1960). The trip deeply influenced his views and vision of culture, arts, and more importantly on cinema. The country reveals itself as a wonderful *ensemble* of pictures, related to a complex background made by different religions, historical moments, and traditions. The film that Eisenstein conceived of was divided into four segments, plus one prologue and one epilogue, and each part was supposed to represent a different aspect - and time - of the Mexican culture, creating a final image of Mexico composed of several diverse shades.

“During my encounter with Mexico, it seems to me to be, in all the variety of its contradictions, a sort of outward projection of all those individual lines and features which I carried and carry within me like a tangle of complexes. (...) The intertwining bronze bodies seemed to incarnate the latent roving of sensuality;

² During his two years in Mexico, Eisenstein shot more than 30 hours, but Sinclair - upset by the continuing delays - kept the materials with him while Eisenstein went back to Moscow after being recalled directly by Stalin. Upton Sinclair realised two films edited by Sol Lesser (*Thunder over Mexico*, 1933 and *Day of the Dead*, 1934), and later two other films were compiled using the material filmed by Eisenstein (*Time in the Sun*, 1939-1940, by Marie Seton and *Mexican Symphony*, 1941-1942, by William Kruse). Just in 1970 the celluloid was sent to the USSR by the Museum of Modern Art, and in 1979 Grigori Aleksandrov -Eisenstein's assistant and screenwriter - realised a new version of *¡Que viva Mexico!* based on the director's notes (Geduld and Gottesman, 1970).

here in the oversaturated, overgrown grasping of the lianas, male and female bodies wreathed and intertwined like lianas. (...) Mexico – lyrical and tender, but also brutal. (...) Physical brutality, whether in the “asceticism” of monks’ self-flagellation or in the torturing of others, in the blood of the bull or the blood of man, pouring over the sands of countless Sunday *corridos* every week, after Mass, in a sensual sacrament; (...). This cruelty of the Mexican does not lie only in bodily mutilation and blood, (...) but also in that wicked humour, irony, and that special sort of Mexican wit (the features of which are already borne by this ominous tarantella), the so-called *vacilada*. This cruel humour of the Mexican is nowhere exhibited more clearly than his attitude toward death. The Mexican despises death. Like every heroic nation, the Mexicans despise both it and those who do not despise it. But this is not enough: the Mexican does more; he laughs at death.” (Eisenstein, 1983: 181-183)

These quotes are extracted from the essay *Mexico* that Eisenstein wrote near the end of his life (1946). In his words we can trace the vivid and strong impact that Mexico had on him, even if the temporal distance allows Eisenstein to recreate a very lucid portrait. Indeed, the violent and primitive substrate that defines primordial reactions to death and life influenced Eisenstein, and his theory about Montage, deeply. *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* by Peter Greenaway tries to express the impact that Mexico had on the Russian director using the method of Montage in different ways - even ironically. The film is the reconstruction of the ten specific days of Eisenstein’s travel in Mexico: the “ten days that shook his world”³ and more precisely, the days he spent in the little *pueblo*

³ The quote - from the film *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* - refers to the title of the book written by John Reed in 1919 about the Russian October Revolution. The book became so famous that the

called Guanajuato. The film is the first of a trilogy; the other two will be about Eisenstein in Switzerland and in Hollywood. Eisenstein only travelled outside Russia a few times. The longest and most significant trip was for almost three years, between August 1929 and May 1932. He spent the first year travelling around Europe, then spent six months in Hollywood, and finally, spent the last period in Mexico. For the majority of his life Eisenstein stayed in Russia, so it is very interesting to note that all the films of Greenaway's trilogy are related to different places, to specific trips made by the Russian director. Several reasons could have motivated this decision, but the most probable one is an attempt to use the trip as an expedient for the narrative structure: a trip is already a story; it no requires other specific contexts or premises. Furthermore, Greenaway choose specific situations of the trips - even the one in Mexico - in which Eisenstein was not filming. This is another stratagem deployed to avoid the danger of making a film about film, but also to centre the story on the director as a real person, with all his weak points and hesitations. As we will see further, Greenaway with his film attempted to strip naked – even literally - the genius of Eisenstein. The British film director deeply studied all writings and documents about this era of Eisenstein's life, and in particular, he found inspiration from the letters that he wrote to Pera Atasheva, his assistant and, later, wife. The letters consist of confidences told to a friend, not just simple reports of various adventures, and in the one relating to his ten days in Guanajuato, Eisenstein wrote in particular about new experiences.

new title to the film *October* directed by Eisenstein became *October: Ten days that shook the world*. There are constant comparisons in the film between the Russian Revolution and the intimate revolution of Eisenstein during his days in Guanajuato, days which changed the director's world.

“Logical analysis may not be completely satisfied with the results, but for the first time I am experiencing and not evaluating (I feel like a butterfly - do you see me from there?). You cannot even imagine what it means to suddenly take it to a 100% after ten years of taking a certain fact to 99% and stopping there out of indecisiveness. I never suspected this. I think that psychologically it is going to have huge consequences. An explosion of a complex is an amazing thing.”
(Salazkin, 2009: 136)

Eisenstein’s supposed sexual liberation (Bergan, 1999) indeed become a key topic of the film *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*, which served Greenaway not only in order to describe the great director as a person, with common feelings and a carnal body, but also, it was used as a base to define a journey within the physical journey, to underline the enormous impact which these days – and in general the months in Mexico - had on Eisenstein. But, behind this main theme of an intimate – and scandalous - relationship with a local man, Palomino, which is used as the elementary sequential line, the film by Peter Greenaway is a puzzle created by Eisenstein’s ideas and works; it is a chaotic journey in his mind. In this sense it is very interesting to note and identify three main ways in which Greenaway refers to Eisenstein in the film.

2.1 The direct quotation

The first approach is related to the direct use of images or words scattered in the film *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*. There are clips of Eisenstein’s films, the transpositions of the writings to Pera Atasheva, some drawings made by Eisenstein, and pictures of the time, portraying the Russian director. The entire film is composed as a series of scenes spacing out, with cut and framed images and additionally, words taken directly from Eisenstein’s life. This direct use of real documents is firstly, a way to validate the film as

a biography, a system of reference to external points of view, which is typical of Greenaway's works. But more importantly, it is the modality used by Greenaway in this film to insert the documents: they become pieces of an evident Montage. In this way, Greenaway is evoking Eisenstein's main great theory, the idea to compose a series of images – even those taken from different contexts - creating meaningful sequences, whilst exaggerating the concept, therefore revealing the artificiality during the process. For instance, when Eisenstein in the film is looking from a gate at the church of Guanajuato - and more precisely at the bell ringer, mute and as deaf as fate – a scene of the film *October* suddenly appears, in which the Russian rebels are protesting against the Tsar at the Winter Palace. Beside scenes from films, Greenaway used several photos related to people who Eisenstein really met - or even pictures of Eisenstein himself - creating sequences with a quick and rapid rhythm. In these scenes, Eisenstein narrates his life and encounters, in an actual vortex of words and images which recall the same rhythm used by Eisenstein in several of his writings. Greenaway imitates the style of Eisenstein, swift and non-linear (Eisenstein, 1983: xxiii-xxv). This is shown especially in the *Memoire*, where Eisenstein described himself as a monkey, jumping void of logic from one topic to another, attracted only by his own curiosity.

“A monkey stops searching for fleas and, without taking its eyes off the carrot, leaps down in three jumps. A piece of white paper to one side of the carrot attracts its eye, for a white impression is sharper than a dull orange one. The carrot is forgotten. The monkey goes over to the piece of paper. But now, somewhere nearby, there is sharp screech and the characteristic, shrill chattering of teeth. The monkey turns away from the paper toward the cry, and its eyes light on a swaying branch, for a moving object is more attractive than a still one. (...) The branch, the paper, the carrot are forgotten. There is only one difference between me and the Alma-Ata monkey. I too jump from object to object as soon as my memory

turns up a new one. But unlike the monkey, I sometimes return to the initial one.”

(Eisenstein, 1983: 222)

Greenaway composes a rapid and articulated rhythm which is not only a direct system designed to evoke the Montage’s theory, but also a system to express how the structure of the entire film is dominated and defined by the Montage’s core ideas, as Eisenstein himself. Therefore, through this more evident layer of relations with Eisenstein, Greenaway used images and words as puzzle pieces – or more precisely, chess pieces - to create a peculiar montage of tormented *memorabilia* which composes - or interrupts? - the whole film. The Montage reveals itself as an abstract structure, as a cinematographic tool, but also as a fundamental and even banal reference which acts as a device to persecute and trouble Eisenstein and his thoughts (O’Pray, 1993: 211-218).

[Please insert Figure 1 about here]

Peter Greenaway, film still from *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*, 2015. In this short sequence, Eisenstein is acting as conductor on a stage. In the background we can recognize a caption from his film *October*. This is one clear example of “directed quotation”.

2.2 The undirected quotation

The second approach referred to Eisenstein in the film is based on the use of undirected quotes. In this case, Peter Greenaway chooses some peculiar aspects of topics related to the Russian director and starting from those he recreates scenes with his own cinematographic methods. For instance, the theme of Piranesi’s *Carceri*, the object of many writings and drawings composed by Eisenstein, is used in the film as scenography for a hidden and dark space in the earth of the city, a place of reprobation and nightmares, full of ambiguous characters. In these *Carceri* – literally “prisons” - Eisenstein meanders,

losing him; he felt sick and he needed to be rescued. Another indirect quote is present at the end of the film, when Eisenstein empties his pockets full of forks stolen from the hotel: in *October* there is a very similar scene. Also, the use of the transparent floor in the room of Eisenstein - and the consequent framings from upside down - appear to refer to the project for the film *The Glass House*⁴, thoughts by Eisenstein that were ultimately never realised (Bulgakowa, 2005). Furthermore, all the scenes captured with 360° shooting recall the idea of a spherical book in which Eisenstein several times tried to define unsuccessfully. He wanted to organise different thoughts and writings in a kind of dynamic book arranged around a core - the Montage - which supports all the relations between spread points⁵. Also, Greenaway's division of the screen image in three parts, each one taken with a different projector and so a different perspective, added to the references to the use of wider screens as in Cinerama: all these elements which appear multiple times during the film seem to be based on the concept of "the Dynamic Square" formulated by Eisenstein and brought to his attention using the geometries of the cinematographic screen.

⁴ Eisenstein started to write and reflect about this idea in 1926 in Berlin, and then in 1930, in Hollywood, influenced by an article on the project of a glass tower by Frank Lloyd Wright. He proposed the seminal concept for the film, with a series of sketches and notes, to Paramount Pictures, who declined the idea. *The Glass House* remained an important project for Eisenstein, who considered it again in 1947 with more drawings and writings.

⁵ This very abstract and never realised project is close to a vision of Montage as a dynamic method of composition which was very popular in this period. Similar ideas developed in the same years include the *Polykino* by Lazlo Moholy-Nagy or the *Bioscopic Book* by El Lissitzky. Eisenstein described this book as an interactive and variable tool, defined by open sequences and able in this way to explain the concept of Montage and all its magnificent and various potentialities.

It is interesting to note that in all these cases Greenaway simply reused some topics, thoughts or scenes created and imagined by Eisenstein, almost using the same ideas but placing Eisenstein as the protagonist of his very own thoughts. The Russian director - as in a kind of dream - lived in his films, in his writings, in his ideas. The result of this approach of indirect quoting is always ironic, even comic: Eisenstein is a real, fragile, person who is not able to satisfy his own imagination. In the *Carceri*'s scene, for instance, Eisenstein feels sick and pukes on his shoes, on the transparent floor of his room he rolls naked and heavy, and he finally stumbles in a chair walking in round during one of the scene captured with 360° shooting. The greatness of cinema - and ideas - is therefore compared with the vulnerability of the human body - even if the body belongs to one of the greatest directors of all time.

[Please insert Figure 2 (a, b) about here]

Peter Greenaway, film stills from *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*, 2015. In Figure 2(a) we can see Eisenstein running in the *Carceri* scenario. In Figure 2(b) Eisenstein and Palomino are rolling naked on the glass floor of Eisenstein's room – evoking the *Glass House* project of the Russian director. Both images are examples of “undirected quotation”.

2.3 The hidden approach

The third system of referencing is more complex, hidden, and reveals the fictional side of the story, beyond the biography. Eisenstein in this film becomes indeed a sort of alter ego of Greenaway and Greenaway's precedent characters. A constant in the work by Peter Greenaway is the use of male protagonist with complex and artistic personalities, all somehow portraying an alter ego of the British director (De Gaetano, 1995). Eisenstein – in the film by Greenaway - follows this line of characters, revealing similarities between them. For example, he shares with Tulse Luper (*The Tulse Luper's Suitcases*, 2003) the

fundamental use of suitcases and the inevitable tendency to become a prisoner (in the space recalling the *Carceri*, in the gate-jail of the bell tower, even the bathroom of the hotel is constructed as a cage for Eisenstein). He also shares some aspects with Stourley Kracklite (*The belly of an architect*, 1987) who is trying to finish a project in Rome: both are pressed by the committees, both are in white dresses, and both encounter death at the end of the film (Kracklite let him fall from the Vittoriano, Eisenstein in Guanajuato just his shoes fall, ‘the more important clothing of a man’, stating that he leaves the city as a “dead man”⁶). Furthermore, the character of Eisenstein shares with Greenaway - and all his characters - a peculiar sensibility to time and death. For Eisenstein time is just an abstract scheme, an agreement to count: only death is real in life, everyone “even Eisenstein like Leonardo”⁷ will die. Saying that, Eisenstein is sharing with Greenaway a sort of disillusioned negativism and the certainty of human impotence: we cannot understand life, we can only try to analyse it, and try to organise it by rules and abstract lays; only death is sure. Greenaway indeed often identified abstract systems as bases to compose his films: the narrative is denied, and so he used external schemes to structure scenes and dialogues. It is a system used to reflect on human impotence but also to underline the artificiality of cinema. Ironically, the primary common systems of order - as in alphabet or time - become for Greenaway, rigid and fundamental lays to follow: the

⁶ All these sentences are pronounced by Eisenstein during the film *Eisenstein in Guanajuato* by Peter Greenaway.

⁷ This sentence is pronounced by Eisenstein in the film during a walk in the cemetery of Guanajuato with Palomino. In this scene, the Russian director is questioning himself about death and its inevitability, whilst considering the more famous and intelligent men of history. It is interesting to note that the great admiration for Leonardo Da Vinci is shared by both the directors (Eisenstein, 1987; Woods, 1996).

story is not defined by the narrative of the events, but by these abstract schemes. Greenaway stated: “I like the abstracted form of the catalogue and the list; organisation by preordained systems – number and alphabet, colour theory, equations – and from there myth and fable, reduced narratives and no narrative at all” (Elliot and Purdy, 1997: 122). In *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*, there are several references to the absurdity of these schemes, which give to humans the illusion to have control over time and life. For instance, there is an ironic temporal reference to the Russian Revolution: the ten days in Guanajuato occurs in October, exactly during the anniversary of the Revolution. Ironically, as Eisenstein noted in the film, it is impossible to celebrate the “right” anniversary: the hours are different in Mexico, and even the month has changed by the new Soviet calendar⁸.

In this third approach, it is interesting to note that Eisenstein has become just a character in the hands of Greenaway: he is no more the great director, he is not the representation of a real person, and finally he is not himself anymore. Greenaway is the inventor and he shapes a character under his will and desire. Adding this other level, it is impossible to consider the film as simple biography: Eisenstein is Eisenstein, but he is also a new shape of Greenaway’s characters, he is Greenaway himself, and with respect to death and time he is the whole of humankind.

[Please insert Figure 3 (a, b) about here]

Peter Greenaway, film still from *The belly of an architect*, 1987, Figure 3(a). Peter Greenaway, film still from *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*, 2015, Figure 3(b). In Figure 3(a), Stourley Kracklite and Dr. Arturo Amansa are observing busts of famous dead persons, speaking about inevitability of death. In Figure 3(b) Palomino is showing to Eisenstein the cemetery of Guanajuato, speaking

⁸. The insurrection of the Winter Palace happened on the 6 and 7 November 1917 (24 and 25 of October for the Julian calendar, still used at that time in the Russian Empire).

about inevitability of death. The comparison of Figure 3(a) to Figure 3(b) shows one of the several similarities between Eisenstein and other precedent Greenaway's characters; it is an example of "hidden approach".

3. Cinema vs Cinema

The film *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*, and the project of an entire trilogy about the Russian director, reveals the huge interest expressed in Eisenstein by Greenaway. But beyond the film, there are more and other relationships between Peter Greenaway and Sergei Eisenstein, even if not directed, especially considering some peculiar aspects of their poetics. We can simplify all the connections and synthesise those into four main groups: intellectual eclecticism, drawing, structures and montages, cinema as total art.

3.1 Intellectual Eclecticism

Speaking about Peter Greenaway, his poetics were described for many years with expressions such as "Neo-baroque" "Controlled complexity" or "Creative eclecticism" (De Gaetano, 1995). All these tags were trying to explain a peculiar and unique way to conceive cinema: Greenaway creates films full of images, quotes, references, usually without consequential or logical narrative schemes. This layering of contents generates a range of meanings, and so of possible interpretations, but beyond that, indeed, the connections used in between images and words are abstracts, even absurd. Furthermore, it is interesting to underline the nature and peculiarities of these images or references used by Greenaway: they are part of his cultural background and more precisely, they are elements of visual arts history. He used quotes from other films, from sculptures and buildings, and especially from paintings. Greenaway created a sort of figurative encyclopaedia, a limitless data base of notes and drawings, taking pieces every time he needs. In this sense, his films are complex successions of visual quotes and symbolic

images; Greenaway takes possession of the figurative and traditional past and reinvents it in the modern, with all the ambiguities generated from the encounter:

“(…) works of art refer to great masses of culture, they are encyclopedic by nature.

The works of art that I admire, even contemporary ones like *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or any three-page story by Borges, have the ability to put all the world together. My movies are sections of this world encyclopedia.” (Pally, 1991: 3)

On the other side, the “Intellectual eclecticism”⁹ of Sergei Eisenstein is evident and clarified by his own writings and films. From the beginning of his career, Eisenstein used the concept of Montage as a system to organise and structure images and references, and very soon he defined more precisely the way in which Montage could be used as a powerful method to move human souls (Eisenstein, 1987: 38-199) using elements taken from different spaces, times, and contexts, locating them in meaningful sequences. The idea of a conflictual and intellectual Montage, therefore, was born as a system to reorganise elements and to create meanings exactly, from numerous contradictions and dialectical differences (Eisenstein, 1988: 1989). Furthermore, Eisenstein referred the concept of Montage to different arts, as he used different disciplines to theorise it, such as Ethnology, Anthropology, and Psychology. In particular, during his time in Mexico and following some authors of the time, for instance Aby Warburg, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Wilhelm Wundt, the reference to the past became fundamental for him in order to provoke a renaissance of the primordial state - or pre-logical thinking. The famous

⁹ This expression refers to the concept of “Intellectual Montage”, more than once used by Eisenstein to explain the dialectical potentialities of the Montage (Eisenstein, 1949).

“sequence of gods” in the film *October* is a perfect example of a Montage of photos, images of divinities taken from very different contexts and traditions, combined together to compose a powerful ensemble. Similarly to Greenaway’s encyclopaedia, the entire history gradually becomes, for Eisenstein, a huge archive, taking and mounting fragments, creating a method of composition entirely based on the use of quotes or fragments realised by others, mounted with a new different meaning. The references to the present through events and actions taken from the past become evident in his later films, as *Bezhin Meadow* (1937), *Alexander Nevsky* (1938) and *Ivan the Terrible* (1944, 1945).

3.2 Drawing

Another fundamental similarity between Sergei Eisenstein and Peter Greenaway is their evidently strong affinity for drawing. Besides their interest of art history in general, both authors possess a great passion for this method of art. For example, Peter Greenaway started his career as a painter:

“I began my film-making when I was an art-student studying to be a mural painter and had ambitions to make every film-image as self-sufficient as a painting. (...) My ambitious were to see if I could make films that acknowledged cinema’s artifice and illusions, and demonstrate that – however fascinating – that was what they were – artifices and illusions. I wanted to make cinema of ideas, not plots, and to try to use the same aesthetics as painting which has always paid great attention to formal devices of structure, composition and framing, and most importantly, insisted on attention on metaphor.” (Greenaway, 1991: 3)

This vision is clearly bound to the tendency of “Intellectual eclecticism” that we explained before: art is an enormous data-base to use. Beyond that, it is fundamental to

note that Greenaway actually uses art and paintings as a box full of references for his films, but on the other hand in his own paintings there is no evidence of “Intellectual eclecticism”. The majority of his art pieces refer to the structure or the topics of his films; they reproduce graphically the organisation of elements or nodes of the story (Pascoe, 1997). In this way, the paintings of major authors become a visual reference (*The draughtsman’s contract*, 1982; *Nightwatching*, 2007), while Greenaway’s drawings are schemes to assist in the development process; they help him to construct the spatial and temporal complexity of cinema. This accurate reconstruction of imaginative ideas is complete only through the final products of films or art installations: drawing instead remains the preparation tool, the instrument used to fix the visual idea and to organise all the concepts.

Sergei Eisenstein’s relationship with drawing is also dense and complicated. As Antonio Somaini wrote (2011: 140-145), we can distinguish between three different kinds of drawings composed by the Russian director: one more personal and instinctive, in which a simple line is the system used to compose interrelated figures, with passionate and intimate themes, then there are drawings created in order to analyse and study in detail his own films, or others works. Finally, there are several drawings created by Eisenstein as useful instruments to compose films. Similarly to Greenaway, Eisenstein was quite obsessed by the structure and organisation of his films and he always used drawings during the creation process to modulate and to organise temporal and spatial aspects of images and sequences of images. In Greenaway’s case, the drawings sometimes become - especially in his first films - directly part of the scenes, meanwhile for Eisenstein they are more canvases which compose lights and shadows, voids and solids, sounds and colours. But, it is fundamental to note that for both the directors, indeed, drawing represents a tool to create, to systematise visual ideas and to structure

space and time: beside the different aesthetic, it is evident the images are not single nodes, static individual elements, but they are part of a sequence, they are already part of a film.

3.3 Structures and Montages

Peter Greenaway started his directing career surrounded by the theories and ideas of Materialist Structuralism - the great engine of avant-garde cinema in United Kingdom during the Seventies. Greenaway always stayed firmly to the side of the movement, never in the middle, restating every time - with films, shorts and words - his independence as an author (Willoquet-Maricondi, 2001: 3-35). However, the focus of the British director on structures over narratives is evident; he is interested in systems able to create relations and orders without referring directly to contents or stories. Especially in his first shorts and films (*Drowning by numbers*, 1988), there is a constant use of abstract structures to compose the scenes: numbers, letters, even maps, become the schemes through which the story is developed. Following this focus on structure, several aspects of the film consequently become elements to coordinate: music, colours, scenes composed as canvas, all the pieces are organised and calculated precisely, revealing the artificiality - and the power - of the cinematographic tool. Despite that, it is evident that Greenaway is not a pure Structuralist: he always defends the expressivity of films, the communicative potentialities of cinema and even if in his films is clear that the structure creates the narrative, and not vice versa, there is always a visual story to tell. In this sense, Greenaway often uses strong and violent images or themes to involve people with the pleasure of viewing (Woods, 2002).

Sergei Eisenstein, on the other hand, initially received an engineering and architectural education, but subsequently began his career in theatre, as a scenographer and costume designer at the Proletkult of Moscow, and later as director of theatre plays and films. At the same time, the Russian tendencies of Constructivism and Avant-garde

were based on the idea of art as a tool at the service of the Revolution, with the themes of mechanics and industrialization represented a new kind of art for people, void of formalisms and decorations. Eisenstein was totally involved in this Cultural Revolution and the concept of Montage was firstly based on the potentialities of the medium, considering the peculiar techniques related, but then also the systems of engaging people (Eisenstein, 1988b: 243-245). Anyway, despite the strong relationship to the common tendency of Avant-garde film, it is fundamental to note Eisenstein's clear intention to keep the expressivity of cinema, to defend the motional features of it – against the idea of cinema developed by Hans Richter, or the one promoted by Dziga Vertov in the same years.

“Ah, is it then possible to achieve direct filmic expression of abstract ideas, of logically formulated theses and intellectual concepts, and not merely emotional phenomena? Is it possible to do this without recourse to the limitations of plot, storyline, characters, actors, etc., etc.? It was possible on the stage to construct an emotionally effective ‘Montage of attractions’ (using plot development within the individual attraction only as a by-product), so it must be possible to achieve effective Montage of intellectual attractions. (...) Therefore, it must possible to construct an entire system of this type of filmic expression, to develop a film capable of making an abstract idea blossom in an emotional way.” (Eisenstein, 1983: 207-208)

The Montage – similarly to the abstract structures in Greenaway - creates a rhythm, an order through which the narrative develops, but there is still a story, and with more passion and expression than usual: the structure indeed combines all the conflicts and tensions into an abstract cage, showing those to the spectators. From his first paper “The montage of attractions” (Eisenstein, 1988b) to his latest concepts of *pathos*,

Eisenstein was indeed extremely concerned about the efficiency of films as forms to interact and involve people in the deepest and most perturbing ways. Similarly, the engagement which Greenaway tries to create through his films is physical and based on corporeal relationships between the characters and the spectators (*The cook, the thief, his wife & her lover*, 1989; *The pillow book*, 1996).

4. Conclusion: Cinema as total Art

As we saw, there are multiple, complex relationships between Peter Greenaway and Sergei Eisenstein. In the first part of the article, we noticed the autonomy of Greenaway in his expressive manners. In the film *Eisenstein in Guanajuato*, Greenaway describes the character of the great Russian director, starting from biographical elements and quotes, but then exaggerating them in his peculiar cinematographic poetic. In the second part instead we analyzed point by point a series of connections and similarities in their methods and general ideas, based on shared visions and theories about cinema. What is evident, in conclusion, beyond the general interest Greenaway has in Eisenstein, is a common view of cinema as language, despite the specific linguistics of the directors. Both possess a personal poetic tone, and during their careers they developed a series of tools and specific expressive manners following this personal touch. But still, it is clear that Greenaway and Eisenstein have a very similar idea of cinema.

The idea of cinema as multiform, dynamic and total art is shared by the two directors. Peter Greenaway experimented in his last years with the art of installations and he created a series of projects without specific disciplinary limits (Elliot and Purdy, 1997). In theatres or in museums, even in churches, Greenaway creates several kinds of visual montages: the installations in real spaces become just a new contemporary system to redefine the cinematographic experience. Especially in some of his latest projects (*The Tulse Luper Suitcases*, 2003-2004), it is interesting to note how the same idea could take

life as a film, then become transformed in an installation or exhibition, and finally in a book and so on.

I am curious about the possibility of taking cinema out of the cinema. I am curious about presenting cinema as a three-dimensional exhibition. I am curious about what constitutes a vocabulary of cinema. I am curious, I suppose, finally, in respect of the new technologies and the apparent morbidity of the old, how we are to go about reinventing cinema. (Greenaway, 1995: 9)

In this sense, the cinematographic art develops itself in different disciplinary systems and reveals the concept beyond the specific tool, beyond the specific materials. Cinema is considered by Greenaway a total, global art based on involving the spectator through a Montage of visual ideas, besides film. Sergei Eisenstein referred to cinema as “synthesis of arts” several times in his writings.

“The cinema is undoubtedly the most international of all arts. And not merely because films made in different countries are shown all over the world. But first of all because with its improving techniques and growing achievements the cinema can establish a direct international contact of creative thought. And yet in the first half century of the cinema’s existence only an insignificant part of its inexhaustible resources has been used. Please don’t misunderstand me. (...) I mean those specific and unique things that can be done and created only in the realm of cinema. The problem of the synthesis of arts, a synthesis realizable in the cinema, has not yet found its full solution.” (Eisenstein, 1970: 5-6)

But beyond the vision of a medium enormously powerful, shared and supported in the Soviet context, he actually identifies in the Montage an international and interdisciplinary method used as efficient system to expression. Eisenstein, especially in

one of his last projects, *General History of Cinema*, explained that we can identify traces of cinema's ancestors in several and different works of history. More than once he stated that cinema is a global, total medium which finally contains all the creative aspects of Montage, and he underlined how the cinematographic method of composing is not just precedent to the same invention of cinema, but it is also bigger and stronger, presenting also beyond the cinema itself. In this sense, the possibility of composing spaces and times through a sequence of images or elements is considered as one of the more efficient artistic processes, applied in different disciplines. This vision seems to be shared by Greenaway: the cinematographic method is a system to compose and to create art, beyond any disciplinary or medium boundaries.

They are not just directors; they are thinkers and developers of cinema as language, as an interdisciplinary theoretical method to communicate. With this common ground the cinematic tool is considered as a process to think, to express and to engage people, involving all kinds of arts, without specific boundaries relating to contents or disciplines. In conclusion, we can state that Sergei Eisenstein and Peter Greenaway are indeed deeply related because they have in common this peculiar and intimate idea of cinema as a fundamental and universal medium, as a system of communication, and moreover, full of potentialities for creating and composing any kind of art.

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